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The Fight of The Norwegian Church

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by

J. L. MOWINCKEL

former Prime Minister of Norway

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Church Organization

Confessionally the Church of Norway is Lutheran. It is a State Church, and its position within the State is clearly defined in the Norwegian Constitution of May 17, 1814. The King is the supreme head of the Church.

Every Norwegian man and woman, unless already belonging to another religious group becomes automatically at birth a member of the Norwegian State Church. All the same there exists in Norway unrestricted freedom of religion, regardless of the citizens' place and position within the community.

The King, however, according to the Norwegian Constitution, *must* be a member of the State Church. The same law applies to the majority of the members of the Cabinet, including the Minister of the Department of Church and Education. Offhand I would say that about 90% of the Norwegian people belong to the State Church. But of course we have other religious groups as well. We have Methodists, Baptists, the Church of the Brethren, and we have Quakers, and the Salvation Army—just as you have in the States. The Catholic Church in Norway is a small but rather important factor with its own Bishop. As for the Jews, there are hardly more than a few thousand of them in all Norway.

Within the Norwegian State Church there have been stormy controversies between conservative and liberal theological factions. For a time these elements

were so irreconcilable that it seemed as if it would develop into a "schism" with the establishment of an independent conservative Free Church. This did not materialize, however, as the conservative element, though the controversies had not been finally adjusted, established their own Theological Seminary, the so-called "Congregational Faculty". The State authorities granted graduates from this faculty the same rights and privileges which the clergy graduating from the Theological Faculty of the University enjoyed.

The Norwegian State Church basically builds its history and its traditions upon the old Norwegian Catholic Church, and still considers the national shrine, the Nidaros Cathedral (the Cathedral at Trondheim) its historic center. The erection of the Nidaros Cathedral started way back in 1136, and its Patron, Saint Olav, is the Martyr King, who was killed in battle at Stiklestad near Trondheim in the year 1,030 in his fight for Christianity. While the Catholic Church had an Arch-Bishop in Nidaros (Trondheim), the Norwegian State Church has no Arch-Bishop. Among Norway's seven Lutheran Bishops it is the Bishop of Oslo, today Eivind Berggrav, who is considered *primus inter pares*.

The German Invasion.

On April 9th, 1940, Norway was brutally, and wholly without any warning whatsoever, attacked by the gigantic German War machine. After 62 days of fierce fighting on

the part of the Norwegians with whatever weapons they could lay their hands upon, Norway succumbed to the overwhelming machine. The King and the government went to England from whence they are continuing the war, conducting the public administration and managing the large Norwegian mercantile fleet in the war effort.

The invading Germans at once promised to protect and safeguard Norwegian Law and Order and its institutions—a promise which of course was very quickly broken. An Administrative Council which, with the approval of the King, was formed through the assistance of the Supreme Court with Bishop Berggrav as arbitrator, was brutally dissolved on September 25, 1940. This was when the Occupation authorities through their Reichskommissær announced that they, under their own supervision, had placed all Norway under the jurisdiction of the despised and hated political party, which had as its leader the traitor Vidkun Quisling. His party represented scarcely more than one per cent of Norway's entire populace of some three million people.

It soon became apparent that the Norwegian Church as well as the religious life in Norway was in grave danger. The pressure became increasingly strong, with an ever-growing demand that the Church not only adopt the New Nazi Order, but that it should also give the Order its blessing. Among other things, a change in the regular Church prayer was enforced, whereby the traditional Church Prayer for the King, for the Government and for the Storting was excluded. The Church then realized that it had to take active steps, even though these steps to begin with were of a purely defensive character. All former controversies within the Church itself were swept aside, and a

carefully planned co-operative action started.

On October 25, 1940, a manifesto was signed by all Seven Bishops headed by Bishop Berggrav, and ten of Norway's leading clergymen from all religious groups. This united action in its organized form was called "The Christian Council for the Church of Norway."

But the battle had just begun. In the most aggressive way schools as well as other cultural and intellectual institutions were brutally attacked by the "Hird", the name of the Quisling Storm Troopers. The academic freedom of the University and the High Schools was violated, and professors and teachers arrested and sent to concentration camps in and outside of Norway. The whole Norwegian legal system was dissolved, with the result that all members of the Supreme Court resigned their offices. The Norwegian clergy were told that they were no longer to be bound by their pledge of silence.

The Letter of the Bishops.

The Church accepted the challenge. In the now famous letter of the Bishops of January 15, 1941,—one of the clearest and most courageous documents written in Norway's fight—the Church declares:

"The Spiritual regime under God concerns itself with justice, truth and compassion, as conceived by the Church within the structure of the State. It is useless to wave the Church aside by stating that it is meddling in politics. Luther said in plain words: 'The Church does not become involved in worldly matters when it beseeches the authorities to be obedient to the highest authority which is God'.

"When the authorities permit acts of violence and injustice, and

exert pressure on our souls, then the Church becomes the defender of the people's conscience.

"One single human soul is worth more than the entire world.

"The Bishops of the Church have therefore placed on the table of the acting Head certain facts and official communiques concerning the governmental administration, which, during the last few months, in the view of the Church, are against the law of God. They give the impression that revolutionary conditions are abroad in our land, and that we are not living under the rules of foreign occupation whereby all laws shall be enforced as far as is compatible with the occupation forces."

"Above all of us stands the One who is Lord of our souls. In our congregations we now perceive a ferment of conscience and we feel it our duty to let the authorities hear clear and loud the voice of the Church."

Thus ends the letter which the Bishops sent to the Quisling "Minister for Church and Education". Everything was done by the Quisling authorities to prevent the contents of this letter to become known in Norway, and the police tried to forbid the clergy to read it from the pulpit. Rarely, however, has a document become as well known as this very document. Meanwhile the Quislings continued their attacks upon the Church, its institutions and its servants. Even Luther's catechism was revised to fit into the New Order. Pastors were discharged all over the country, but their congregations remained faithful to them. Bishop Berggrav was all along the central figure in the controversy. He was the chieftain, the courageous and dauntless leader whose fearless course of action against injustice and outrages has won everyone's admira-

tion. For a time it seemed as if the Germans were afraid of molesting Berggrav, and it seemed as if they restrained the Quislings who furiously scolded him through their press.

The Attack on Bishop Berggrav.

On February 1, 1942, however, when Hitler's Reichskommissær in Oslo, Josef Terboven, appointed Quisling "Ministerpresident", it was Terboven himself who launched the attack upon Berggrav, which gave Quisling free hands. It was especially Berggrav's much heralded peace mission and journey in the autumn of 1939 both to Germany and to England which formed the basis for Terboven's personal and violent attack upon Berggrav. It was said that Berggrav upon this trip had been in league with Jews, plutocrats, and other enemies of Greater Germania and that he preferred politics to religion. At this juncture the Quislings and their press knew that they were free to treat Berggrav according to suit.

On that same day, February 1, 1942, a Quisling body armed with banners, party signs and a band marched into the Nidaros Cathedral, and transformed the High Mass into a political caricature. When later that day Dean Fjellbu attempted to conduct services, entrance to the Church was blocked by the police. In freezing cold more than two thousand men and women stood outside the Church, and with tears in their eyes sang the old Lutheran battle hymn:

"A mighty fortress is our God, a trusty shield and weapon."

This immediately resulted in the discharge and arrest of Dean Fjellbu. The seven Bishops thereupon sent in their respective resignations, and in a comprehensive document stated their reasons for so doing. In it they referred to the

Nidaros event—which in the meantime had had the support and approval of the so-called “Church Department”—and stated that they under the circumstances were unable to continue in their offices.

Said the Bishops:

“The Bishops of the Norwegian Church would be unfaithful to their calling if they continued as part of an administration, which in this manner and without ecclesiastical reason offends the congregations and adds injustice to violence. I therefore give notice that I hereby resign my office. That is to say, I give up the office with which the State has entrusted me. The spiritual mission which was bestowed upon me when I was consecrated at the Altar of the Lord is still mine with all rights and privileges. It is still my office to preach the gospel, to watch over the congregation, and to be the spiritual guide of the Clergy. I shall in the future carry on in this Mission so far as is possible for one who is not a government official. But to continue administrative co-operation with a State that violates the Church would be to betray the holiest of holy.”

The clergy joined the Bishops in such great numbers that out of a body of 1,139 ministers only 39 went over to Quisling.

Meanwhile the resignations of the Bishops were accepted in a most disgraceful way, and Berggrav was, to begin with, thrown into jail and later placed in solitary confinement in a small cabin enclosed by barbed wire in the hills outside of Oslo.

The Easter Message.

The Quislings now took a new decisive step declaring that the schools and the teachers should adhere to the philosophy of the New Order. At the same time, and in keeping with the New Order, the education of children was to be or-

ganized along lines which would altogether remove them from the influence of their parents and of their homes. Practically all the teachers as well as the parents protested against this. Consequently, thousands of teachers were discharged, and punished in the most brutal manner by being shipped like cattle to do forced labor in concentration camps in the north of Norway and outside Norway.

As a result of this new development, the Pastors during Easter Services this year delivered the following message to their Congregations:

“The Church would fail in its duty towards Christian education were it to stand by and calmly watch a secular Power plan the moral and spiritual education for Children and Adults independent of, and contrary to all Christian precepts. Parents and Teachers must not be forced to violate their conscience and leave Children to be brought up in a way which will revolutionize their minds, and introduce a lasting spiritual injury altogether foreign to Christianity.”

Negotiations.

But the aroused resentment which the whole nation supported was so strong that the Quislings now realized they were thoroughly losing ground on the Church Front, and so attempts were made to bring about peace negotiations. The Church subsequently set forth the following conditions for such negotiations:

(1) All negotiations must take place through the medium of the Bishops of the Church, and among them Bishop Berggrav.

(2) Berggrav must therefore be released before any negotiations can be started. The entire Norwegian nation is gravely offended at

the treatment accorded Bishop Berggrav, and to which treatment he is still subjected, and consider the injury done Bishop Berggrav an attack upon the Church.

(3) All negotiations must take place on free soil without any restrictions.

As the Quislings refused to accept these terms the fight has continued.

The situation today may be summed up in a message from the Church to the Nazi authorities dated September 14, 1942, and which reads as follows:

"Here we stand today. God has given us grace and strength to stand up under all that has befallen us. We have been sustained by the prayers and the faith of our ministers and congregations. At this moment we do not know whether it will be negotiations with the Church or an open breach. But even so, we stand fearlessly here.

Let us continue our work along the old lines with serenity and composure, and in these critical times all join in humble prayers for our Church and our People. We steadfastly believe in God's Promise that all things will work together for good to them who love Him."

This is briefly the outward development of the fight, and news received during these last few days indicate that the persecution of the Church and its servants rages on with the same violence as before. As late as in October a number of well-known clergymen were thrown out of their towns and districts, and placed under police control. But even so the stand of the Church and the People remains firm.

The Fight Gives Repercussion.

This fight has tremendously strengthened and increased the importance and position of the

Church in Norway—I should say even beyond Norway's borders. And this all the more so as it is not only a fight by the Church to protect the Church, but to safeguard the spiritual and cultural life on the whole, which has been subjected to the most brutal violation. The Nazi religion will neither tolerate the continuation of spiritual freedom, nor the free and scientific life and work at the universities, nor the wholesome activities of the schools.

The Church is also protecting the homes. For even into the holiest of the holy in the homes, into the relationship between parents and children has the New Order violently thrust itself. The Nazis demand that children hardly out of their cradles be surrendered and given over to compulsory education, and be altogether removed from parental influence.

The Church is the leading factor in this fight to safeguard and protect Culture, Science, Schools and Homes. With the Lutheran State Church stand all other denominations, Protestant and Catholic, firmly and unbreakably together. It has become an "Ecclesia militans".

All the peoples of the North have been awakened by the sound of the Storm Bells from Norway. Of course it is difficult for Denmark and Finland in their present plight too openly to give evidence of their sympathy with Norway in her cultural fight. But this is not the case with Sweden. Sweden has given and continues to give the strongest expression of understanding of Norway's fighting Church. The Swedish Bishops have sent out a special message in support of the Norwegian Church and both the Bishops and innumerable Swedish ministers have expressed their indignation at the disgraceful treatment accorded Bishop Berggrav, and so many other of the servants

of the Church. It can indeed be said that the Swedish Church with proud brotherly feeling has joined in the Cause of the Church of Norway.

Christianity Against Nazism.

I have already several times pointed out the most remarkable feature in the present fight of the Norwegian Church: All strife and disagreements of every nature within the Church itself and between the various groups and church communities have altogether ceased. This is all the more remarkable as these controversies often took a bitter and irreconcilable form. This is indeed a glowing example to all the various churches of the world—even to the churches here in the U. S. A.

But then it is a fight for the belief and ideals of all Christian churches. It is truly a cultural fight. It is two different phases of culture, two spiritual elements that fight each other. It is two kinds of faith, two religions.

Last spring a book was published in Germany. Already at that time 200,000 copies had been distributed. It was called *Gott und Volk—Soldatisches Bekenntniss** and written by a young German soldier fighting in the front lines. He claims to express himself on behalf of all fighting German youth. The author expresses himself categorically:

"In Germany today Christian soldiers do not exist any longer." He describes in impressive words how his generation has left the old beliefs behind, and how it has fought its way to a new faith. He goes on to say: "I believe in a God of Power and his eternal Germany." "We have deviated from the Jewish fables," and "the more deeply we have delved into the National-Socialistic creed, the more our hearts have

turned away from the faith that was our forefathers. Here Germany appealed to us—there Christ. And we realized, for the sake of Germany that there was no other way out than to drive Christ from our hearts in order that Germany may fill the whole place." "Christianity is but a sprout on the tree of Judaism." "It is the religion of the small and the weak, the religion of cowardly and pitiable people." "The God of the Christians is a God of Love but Love cannot be the essence of Divinity." "It is the strong who rule, and the weak who should be ruled." "There is no question here of Love. That is why we do not speak of the God of Love." "Our God is a God of Power." "And our ideal is not the patiently suffering Christ, but the strong fighting Hero." "The Jewish creed and the Christian religion has made God small and human. The German God is an omnipotent power, a vision without form, whose presence one can but anticipate and sense—but not see." "We Germans have by fate been chosen to be the first to break with Christianity. To us it is an honor."

Victory for Civilization.

I feel this will suffice to make clear to you all that is involved in this war. It is not only a war for liberty and democracy. It is a war for deep spiritual ideals. It is a war for a culture that dates back some two thousand years, for an ethical conception which has formed the basic principles of civilisation for a whole world, and which is now being threatened in its innermost being.

It is in this World Struggle for total freedom, the Church of Norway courageously takes her place. It is a struggle in which all Christian Churches throughout the world, even the German Church, of necessity, must stand together, because it vitally concerns the future of them all.

Can there be any doubt as to ultimate victory?

* "God and People, Confessions of a Soldier."

The Church and the Persecution of the Norwegian Jews

I

All the various Norwegian Church organizations, the Theological Faculty of the University of Oslo and the Congregational Theological Faculty, have handed the "Minister President" Vidkun Quisling a letter of protest against the persecution of the Norwegian Jews, which has been enforced since November 1942.

The letter reads as follows:

"To Minister President Quisling,
Oslo:

"The Minister President's law, announced October 27, 1942 regarding the confiscation of property belonging to Jews has been received by our people with great sorrow which was deepened by the decree that all Jewish men over 15 years of age were to be arrested.

"When we now appeal to the Minister President it is not to defend whatever wrongs Jews may have committed. If they have committed crimes they shall be tried, judged and punished according to Norwegian law, just as all other citizens. But those who have committed no crime shall enjoy the protection of the laws of our country.

"For 91 years Jews have had a legal right to reside and earn a livelihood in our country. Now they are being deprived of their property without warning, and the men are being arrested and thus prevented from providing for their

impoverished wives and children. This conflicts not only with the Christian commandment of 'love thy neighbor', but with the most elemental of legal rights. These Jews have not been charged with any transgression of the country's laws, much less convicted of such by judicial procedure. Nevertheless they are being punished as severely as the worst criminals. They are being punished because of their racial background, wholly and solely because they are Jews.

"This disaffirmation by the authorities of the Jews' worth as human beings is in sharp conflict with the Word of God which from cover to cover proclaims all racial groups to be of one blood. See particularly Acts 17:26. Indeed there are few points where God's Word speaks more plainly than here. God does not differentiate among people. Romans 2:11. There is neither Jew nor Greek. Galatians 3:28. There is no difference. Romans 3:22. Above all else: When God through incarnation became man, He allowed Himself to be born in a Jewish home of a Jewish mother.

"Thus, according to God's Word, all people have, in the first instance, the same human worth and thereby the same human rights. Our state authorities are by law obliged to respect this basic view. Paragraph 2 of the Constitution states that the Evangelical Lutheran religion will remain

"The fight of the Norwegian Church against Nazism," a complete up-to-date documentation by Bjarne Høye and Trygve M. Ager, will be published shortly by Macmillan's Publishing House

the religion of the State. That is to say, the State cannot enact any law or decree which is in conflict with the Christian faith or the Church's Confession.

"When we now appeal to the authorities in this matter we do so because of the deepest dictates of conscience. By remaining silent about this legalized injustice against the Jews we would make ourselves co-guilty in this injustice. If we are to be true to God's Word and to the Church's Confession we must speak out.

"Regarding temporal authority our Confession states that it has nothing to do with the soul but that it shall 'protect the bodies and corporal things against obvious injustice, and keep the people in check in order to maintain civic peace and order.' Augustana, Article 28. This corresponds with God's Word which says all authority is of God and established by Him as 'not a terror to good works, but to the evil.' Romans 13:3.

If the temporal authority becomes a terror to good works, that is, to the one who does not transgress against the country's laws, then it is the Church's God-given duty as the conscience of the State to object.

"The Church, namely, has God's call and full authority to proclaim God's law and God's gospel. Therefore it cannot remain silent when God's commandments are being trampled underfoot. And now it is one of Christianity's basic values which is violated, the commandments of God which are fundamental to all society, namely, law and justice.

"Here one cannot dismiss the Church with a charge that it is mixing into politics. The Apostles spoke courageously to the authorities of their day and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men.' Acts 5:29. Luther says: 'The Church does not interfere in temporal matters when it warns the

authority to be obedient to the highest authority, which is God.'

"By the right of this our calling we therefore warn the temporal authority, saying in the name of Jesus Christ: Halt the persecution of Jews. Stop the racial hatred which is being spread in our country through the newspapers.

"In the same manner in our preaching we warn our people to desist from injustice, violence and hatred. He who lives in hatred and encourages evil invokes God's judgment upon himself.

"The Minister President has on several occasions emphasized that Nasjonal Samling, according to its program, will safeguard the basic values of Christianity. Today one of these values is in danger. If it is to be protected, it must be protected soon.

"We have mentioned it before, but re-emphasize it now in closing: This appeal of ours has nothing to do with politics. We maintain before the temporal authority that obedience in all temporal matters which God's Word demands."

(Sixty signatures followed.)

II

On Sunday November 15th and on Sunday November 22nd this year prayers were offered in all Norwegian Churches for the persecuted Jews, and the above letter of protest was, as far as possible, made known throughout Norway.

III

From Stockholm comes news under date of December 2nd that all Swedish Bishops headed by Arch Bishop Eidem have issued a flaming protest against the persecution of the Norwegian Jews.

"Let us pray for our Brothers of the tribe of Israel", says the protest, which scores in particularly severe terms introduction into the Scandinavian peninsula of inhuman methods of persecution alien to the sense of justice and compassion of the peoples of the north.

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